

This story begins at the end of Goblet of Fire, the text in bold quoted directly from the novel.

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Dumbledore made sure that the door was closed, and that Madam Pomfrey's footsteps had died away, before he spoke again. "And now," he said, "it is time for two of our number to recognize each other for what they are. Sirius ... if you could resume your usual form."

The great black dog looked up at Dumbledore, then, in an instant, turned back into a man.

Mrs. Weasley screamed and leapt back from the bed. "Sirius Black!" she shrieked, pointing at him.

"Mum, shut up!" Ron yelled. "It's okay!"

Snape had not yelled or jumped backward, but the look on his face was one of mingled fury and horror. "Avada Kedavra!"

In the instant that Snape's wand shot up and the sickly green light raced to impact with Sirius at such close range, there was no time for anyone to react. Sirius crumpled to the floor, eyes wide, but otherwise showing no acknowledgement of surprise at his imminent demise. Then several things happened at once, and it would only be determined by examination of a pensieve memory months later exactly how they played out. But the end result was that Snape lay petrified and bound, face down on the hospital room floor, Ron was cowering behind his mother, Hermione trembling with rage as she interposed herself between Harry, who was looking rather sickly and at the same time murderous, and Dumbledore, who was frowning

slightly as he looked down at the potions master. The headmaster seemed only mildly concerned, which horrified Harry and was quickly beginning to wear on Hermione's patience. "Severus, I am so disappointed in you."

As Dumbledore made to point his wand at Snape, Hermione shrieked in rage. "What are you doing?!?! He just killed Sirius for no reason! You can't just kill him, he has to stand trial!"

"You misunderstand, Miss Granger." Dumbledore flicked his wrist and the magical ropes disappeared. "It is unfortunate that Severus and Sirius could not see eye to eye, but now more than ever, we need the information he can provide from the Death Eaters."

Before he could remove the petrification, the room lit up with a burst of raw energy, and Hermione was absolutely seething. Everyone else in the room except Harry was bound and frozen in place, and a number of objects were flying around the room. Harry was still completely exhausted and stuck in his bed, but he wouldn't have moved even if he could. He was caught between rage at the two professors and fear at his best friend's loss of control.

Hermione, on the other hand, was nowhere near finished. "He just used an Unforgivable to murder someone he knows for a fact to be innocent of any wrongdoing, and you're content to let him walk free?!?! What is wrong with you?!?!"

Molly Weasley was nearly overcome by fury. "Hermione, what do you think you are doing? Let us go, the headmaster must have his—"

"Shut up, Mrs. Weasley." Hermione's voice was cold and with a flick of her wrist a Silencio did just that, although in her anger she accidentally hit Ron as well. "A man uses an Unforgivable, a crime which society has deemed worthy of automatic imprisonment for the remainder of a person's life, and your response is 'oh well, that's a pity'?"

"Miss Granger, you do not comprehend what is happening—"

"Oh no, I know exactly what is happening. This is 1981 all over again, murderers walk free because of who their friends are. Those who do not remember the past are doomed to repeat it, headmaster." Hermione turned to face Harry, magic still crackling freely around her body. "Do you really want to stay here? Where you nearly die at least once a year, people hate you one day and praise you as a hero the next, and your teachers think it's perfectly alright to kill your godfather for no reason?" She had been reconsidering the prospect of magical Britain over the past months, ever since Harry's name was drawn from the Goblet of Fire, and the more she thought about it, the more she disliked. Multiple incidents showing the justice system to be a travesty, the enforcement of magical contracts that were never agreed to by one of the parties, the enslavement of an entire race and minimal rights for non-human sentient beings, and a pervasive bigotry based only on accident of birth directed at those with one or more muggle relatives. None of these things were particularly pleasant on their own, but in their totality, it was becoming nearly unbearable.

Harry was still in shock, and as such really didn't answer her question as he stared at the two professors, pointing at Snape. "He—he killed—he killed Sirius!" Then a look of anguish came over his face, as he moved his hand to point at Dumbledore. "And he wants him to go free!"

Hermione frowned. "You're clearly not in any shape to decide anything right now..." Walking over to her friend, she took the rest of the Dreamless Sleep potion from the bedside table and emptied into his mouth, which Harry promptly swallowed and passed out. Hermione knew there was only one being she could trust without question that was immediately available, so she called for him, in the hopes that he could help her. "Dobby!"

The eccentric little house elf appeared with a very sharp crack. "How can Dobby serve the great Harry Potter sir and his Grangy?"

Hermione shook off the odd greeting. "Dobby, I need you to take Harry someplace safe, far away from Hogwarts where no one can find you, and help him get better. Do not tell anyone where you take

him, not for any reason, not even me! I will get Harry's things and find a way to contact you both later."

Dumbledore was struggling against the wild magic which was holding him in place. "Miss Granger, what are you doing? You have no authority—"

"And neither do you, Dumbledore!" Hermione's eyes flashed dangerously as she turned to face him again. "How is it, I wonder, that Harry's parents did not leave a will, when his father was a member of an old pure-blood family that was nowhere near destitute, in the middle of a war? And why, knowing her sister hated her and all things magical, would Harry's mother insist on his placement with her? I suspect you interfered, for whatever reason, and Gringott's would be very interested to hear that one of their clients has been purposely been kept ignorant of his heritage." Hermione's ranting was becoming slightly hysterical as she got angrier, and the objects flying around the room accelerated. "I am finished with magical Britain, and assuming Harry isn't too traumatized to think clearly in a few days, I expect he will be too. Dobby, take Harry and go, NOW!"

Something in Hermione's command changed Dobby in that moment, and although he could never describe exactly what it was, he knew what it meant. "Yes, Mistress, Dobby is going." With an even louder than normal crack, Dobby, Harry, and his entire hospital bed disappeared from the infirmary.

With unbridled fury, Hermione walked over to Snape, still lying prostrate on the floor, and kicked him as hard as she could in the face. Hearing his nose break with a satisfying crunch, the teen spit on her former professor before grabbing Harry's wand, tucking it down inside the back of her bra for safekeeping, and the bag of galleons laying forgotten on his bedside table, and walked out of the ward. Slamming the doors behind her, Hermione's uncontrolled magical outburst finally began to subside just a little. But she needed more time, so she did something her Ancient Runes professor had warned her never to attempt, and used her wand to slice her palm. Dipping the tip in the freely flowing blood, the teen began writing a series of runes on the doors to the infirmary. When she finished, Hermione repaired the cut and departed for Gryffindor Tower, leaving behind a set of doors

magically sealed in her own blood. Of course the practice was banned in magical Britain because the Ministry was fearful of its possible uses, being much stronger than the average engraved rune and in some cases having permanence, but this wasn't going to stop Hermione. If done correctly, the occupants of the infirmary would be stuck there at least twenty-four hours, and quite possibly longer, before the runes could be broken, and then only by someone who knew what Hermione had done, which would give her valuable time.

A few moments and a quick detour to the Owlery later (remembering that Hedwig would need to be told to leave and hide herself away somewhere), she found herself standing in front of the portrait hole, very much out of breath as she wheezed out the password. Fortunately for her, she encountered no opposition or questioners in her travels. Once the portrait swung open, she raced through the common room and up the stairs to the boys' dormitory, completely ignoring the entirety of Gryffindor House gathered behind her. Tossing the bag of gold, now lightly stained from her healed but bloody hand, in Harry's trunk and quickly gathering the few possessions he had left unpacked, Hermione slammed the trunk lid closed before levitating it behind her out of the room. A quick trip back through the common room, and a few minutes later she had successfully packed her own belongings, leaving her standing at the foot of her bed with two very heavy trunks. Hermione narrowed her eyes as she considered her options. She couldn't maintain levitation charms on both trunks simultaneously for very long, and she needed a plan for how to get to her home in Crawley as soon as possible. She was really starting to regret sending Dobby away so hastily, a house elf would be very helpful at the moment, no matter how much she detested how they were treated, and suddenly she had one of her trademark brilliant ideas. "Winky! I need your help, please!"

A sharp pop brought said elf to the dorm room, and she warily looked up at the teen. "What is you needing Winky for? You is not setting Winky free, you is not Winky's master!"

"No, Winky! No, I'm not trying to make you free." Hermione bit her lower lip in concentration. "Winky, you like Dobby and Harry, right? Aren't they your friends?"

The house elf scrutinized Hermione with a gaze. "Proper house elves don't have friends... but yes, Winky likes Dobby and Harry. Winky is not sure if she likes you, trying to make the others free and not being proper house elves."

Hermione's mind raced as she tried to figure out what she could do. "Winky, tonight some very bad people hurt Harry, and Dobby went with him to make sure he stayed safe. The headmaster was not going to help Harry, so Dobby hid Harry away somewhere. I have to leave Hogwarts tonight and take both of our things with me so I can go help Harry and Dobby. Do you know how to help me leave? I have to go to my parents' house and talk to them, and I can't risk being found, or the bad people will hurt me. If they hurt me, I can't help Harry and Dobby."

Winky considered the teen's words for a moment. "Winky will help... if you is agreeing to be Winky's mistress. Winky is not liking Hogwarts, but she has nowhere else to go."

Hermione was completely torn. She couldn't very well fight for house elf rights and try to free them if she owned one herself. But on the other hand, this would be for Harry... and her own safety if she was honest with herself. "Alright, Winky. We'll work out details later, but I agree to be your mistress. What do I have to do?" Before Hermione could say another word, Winky grabbed her hand and put it on her own shoulder. When Hermione took it away in shock, there was a light sort of tattoo left behind, but her initials were clearly visible in fancy script. "Oh Winky! I didn't hurt you, did I?"

"Not at all, Mistress." Winky shook her head, and for the first time that Hermione could remember, there was a smile on her face. "It was unpleasant, but needed. Now, Mistress, what is Winky to do first?"

"Do you know where Crawley is, Winky? I need to go home and see my parents." Hermione was still a little shocked that she had essentially branded another sentient being, but she couldn't let herself think about that at the moment.

Winky snapped her fingers and both trunks disappeared. Before her mistress could protest, Winky grabbed her hand and snapped her

fingers again. With a loud cracking sound, the pair reappeared in an alley with both trunks. "Is this to Mistress's liking? Winky knows places Mistress knows, but thought Mistress's muggle parents might be upset if Winky brought Mistress into the house directly."

Hermione finally shook herself out of her temporary stupor enough to realize that the pair were in an alley two blocks from her house. "Excellent work, Winky. Would you please wait here, and when I call you, bring the trunks with you into the house? I am going to go talk to my parents quickly, and warn them you are coming."

"As you wish, Mistress." Winky grabbed both trunks and suddenly faded from view until all Hermione could see was a vague outline. Anticipating her new mistress's question, the house elf smiled. "House elves can hide from muggles so they can stay with masters and mistresses when they be going about."

Hermione thought for a moment, then smiled back. "Can you follow me then, staying hidden like that? I'd prefer not to leave you alone here if I don't need to, it's not as safe for either of us." Seeing her new compatriot nod in agreement, Hermione began her trek to her parents' house. Three minutes later, she was standing on their front step, and about to ring the doorbell when she heard three familiar voices inside. "Oh Dobby, I hope you didn't do what I think you did!" Opening the door and rushing inside, Hermione was immediately thankful that there were no windows on the first floor which faced the street, and at the same time horrified to see Harry's hospital bed in the middle of the living room, which was in a bit of disarray as furniture and various other things were strewn across the floor. Dobby stood atop the bed, straddling his unconscious charge, and was glaring at her parents. Her mother was pressing herself against the wall in terror, and her father stood in front of her, brandishing a poker from the fireplace. "Daddy, Dobby, stop! Both of you, calm down this instant!"

Hermione's yelling got everyone's attention except for the still comatose Harry, and for a moment everyone froze in place, until the door closed behind Hermione, and Winky made her appearance with the two trunks. Winky took one look at everyone, scowled, and made a sweeping motion with her arm. Instantly the room returned to a

state Hermione was more familiar with, and the hospital bed, along with its occupant took up residence in an otherwise empty corner. The Granger parents were now seated on the couch, and across the coffee table from them, Hermione sat in a chair with Dobby and Winky each sitting on a trunk at her sides. The female elf was now glaring at Dobby. "Winky is most upset with Dobby! Mistress was raised by muggles, Dobby should know better than to show up unannounced. Mistress's parents don't know anything about house elves, so Dobby is scaring them!"

Hermione reached out and put her hands on the shoulders of both house elves and looked back and forth between them for a moment. "It's alright Winky, right now we have more important things to take care of. Dobby, I don't understand, I told you to take Harry somewhere that no one could find the two of you."

"Mistress, you is saying that in front of everyone, and is saying not to tell anyone where I is taking the great Harry Potter sir, not even you. Bad people will not be looking in you's house if you is telling Dobby that in front of everyone. Bad people will go looking in places the great Harry Potter sir would go, or places Dobby would go. The great Harry Potter sir is not knowing where you's house is, and the bad people know he is not knowing where or the great Harry Potter sir would have run away long ago to hide here. Dobby is only knowing this place from when he was stopping the great Harry Potter sir from getting his mail, from when Dobby was still serving old master and mistress, and Dobby is never telling anyone Dobby knows this place."

Hermione's thoughts raced as she converted the somewhat jumbled speech into something she could comprehend. After taking a moment to gather her thoughts, she realized Dobby had indeed done something ingenious. "Good job, Dobby! We can't stay here long though, only a day or two at the most." Finally turning her attention to her parents, who were staring at her with looks of incredulity, the teen bit her lip nervously. "Mum, Dad, I think I owe you a few explanations. But can you let me tell you as much as I've figured out, then ask your questions?"

Jane-Marie and Frederick Granger were anything but stupid, but at the moment, they really were feeling as though they were missing

vital information. A glance between them silently confirmed each others' thoughts, and Jean-Marie fixed her daughter with a stern glare, unnervingly similar to that of Professor McGonagall, but of course she didn't know that. "As long as you start with why exactly there's an unconscious boy in a hospital bed showing up in our living room in the middle of the evening, go right ahead."

Hermione chewed nervously on her bottom lip for a moment, then proceeded to tell her parents every important thing that had happened since she had left for the Burrow and the Quidditch World Cup the previous summer up until Madam Pomphrey left the hospital wing looking for Winky, who actually wasn't distraught at all when found by the healer. Winky had not yet heard what transpired at the end of the third task, as the healer didn't know the details and wasn't about to say anything to the house elf until she did. So it was somewhat understandable that Winky asked to excuse herself for a moment after hearing the last few minutes of Hermione's story. In her two hour retelling of events, which she thought was quite impressive given the amount of information she had to summarize, Hermione did not lie, dissemble, or omit any details that she thought might have made the slightest difference to her parents. Then it was time for the most horrible part of all, and as she related the events which transpired from that point forth, she could have sworn her parents were going to become physically ill a number of times, especially when she mentioned intentionally cutting her palm to draw the blood runes on the door of the infirmary.

When she had finished, including all of her suspicions about possible malfeasances against Harry, she was very surprised to hear only one compound question come from Frederick. "When are we leaving, for where, and what do we have to do to before we leave Britain?"

Hermione was absolutely stunned. "I... I don't know. I haven't had time to think it through. We probably have about a day, maybe a day and a half from now, before they can open the infirmary, but we should try to leave before that. But what about Harry? We can't leave him here!"

Jane-Marie chuckled softly as she shook her head. "Silly girl, he's coming with us. I know how much he means to you, you'd sooner

stay here than come with us if we wouldn't take him along." At the look on her daughter's face, Jane-Marie only continued to laugh. "Don't look so shocked, Hermione Jane, it's a mother's job to know these things."

Hermione changed her focus towards her father, but he only threw up his hands in submission. "Don't look at me, I really don't think attempting to flee the country while taking on a teenage boy as a guest is exactly a wonderful idea. But you know your mother, once she makes up her mind, it's impossible to change it. Now we need to decide where we're headed, and we have to make sure we don't forget to do anything before we leave, as we won't be coming back."

"Well... we need to go see the goblins at Gringott's. That's the bank in Diagon Alley. But we can't do that until Harry is better... they won't talk to us without him. He needs to get his money and property from them." Hermione looked down at her side to see Dobby returning her gaze. "Dobby, do you know when Harry will be well enough to travel to Diagon Alley?"

"Yes, Mistress, the great Harry Potter sir will be ready after lunch. Only rest will help now, Dobby doesn't have any more of the potion the nurse-lady was giving him or he would be better by morning." Dobby began hitting his head on the floor, clearly distraught that he lacked the potion Harry would benefit from.

Hermione shook her head in dismay. "Dobby, stop that! Harry would not want you to hurt yourself." Once the house elf complied, Hermione peered over at Harry for a moment before looking back at Dobby. "Dobby, Madam Pomphrey was giving Harry two potions that I know about, Dreamless Sleep and the anti-Cruciatus. Was it one of those? Dreamless Sleep is very thick and looks purple, anti-Cruciatus is thinner and blue."

Dobby nodded in agreement. "The great Harry Potter sir needs more of the blue potion. No more purple, the great Harry Potter sir has taken as much as he can already without getting sick."

Jane-Marie interrupted before her daughter could say anything further. “Dreamless Sleep I understand, that seems fairly straightforward. But what is this anti-Cruciatus, and why does Harry need more of it?”

Hermione shuddered visibly in her chair and closed her eyes. “Mum, do you remember what I told you about the three Unforgivable Curses? Specifically the Cruciatus Curse... it causes horrible pain, like being constantly electrocuted. Harry was hit with that curse tonight, probably more than once. From what I’ve read, it causes so much pain that the nerves in your body stop functioning if it is held for too long. The only known way to heal the injuries it causes, other than rest, is the potion Dobby is talking about.” Hermione nervously swallowed before returning her attention to Dobby. “Dobby, do you know of anyone at Hogwarts who might have more of it besides what is in the infirmary? No one can go in there until my blood runes are removed.”

Dobby scratched his head for a moment, which looked decidedly odd to Hermione but she wasn’t about to complain, before a smile came to his face. “The greasy one... the one that hurt the great Harry Potter sir’s friend... the greasy one has it in his rooms! Dobby is remembering it from when Dobby had to clean it yesterday. Other house elves is being afraid of the greasy one, but Dobby is not being scared, so Dobby cleans.”

An absolutely evil grin came over Hermione’s face, and her parents were quite appalled, never having seen such a look on her normally angelic face. “Dobby, how would you like to go visit Hogwarts and liberate a few things from the greasy one? Take anything you think might be useful, including all of his finished potions. Just make sure you don’t get hurt or caught by anyone, and bring everything here when you’re done.” Instantly Dobby popped away with an equally feral grin, and Jane-Marie was about to start lecturing, but her daughter beat her to the punch. “Mum, the man is a murderer who has mistreated nearly every child he’s ever taught that isn’t in his own house. If ever there was someone who deserved to have his things stolen, Snape is it. Besides, this will help Harry get better.”

Jane-Marie frowned before giving a brief nod of acquiescence and changing the subject. "Hermione, I know you said that you became Winky's mistress, but why is Dobby calling you 'Mistress' as well?"

Hermione goggled for a moment as she realized what her mother said. "I don't know actually... I didn't do anything like with Winky. I should ask him when he gets back here."

Winky took this moment to come back into the room. "Winky apologizes, Mistress. Winky is being sad hearing what old master's son did, but Winky is properly ashamed of having helped old master to hide him."

"It's alright, Winky, come here." Hermione got out of her chair and knelt on the floor, bring herself close to Winky's height as she sat back on her heels. When Winky came within arms' reach, Hermione slowly moved her hand to Winky's shoulder and pulled her closer. "You had to do what Mister Crouch told you, even if it was wrong, right?" Seeing Winky nod slowly, Hermione softly placed her hand on Winky's back. "You have nothing to be ashamed of then. This is why I think house elves should not be slaves, Winky, because their masters can make them do things that are wrong. There isn't anything wrong with serving a family and being helpful, but you shouldn't be forced to do things that are wrong."

Winky shrugged her shoulders as she looked up at her mistress. "It is how things is, Mistress. Winky is being sorry but Winky is not knowing any other way."

Before Hermione could say anything further on the subject, Dobby returned, followed an instant later by two enormous trunks, each easily three times his size. "Dobby is back, Mistress! Dobby is liberating lots of useful things from the greasy one." Dobby pulled two vials out of his makeshift tunic and held them aloft for inspection with some measure of reverence, each filled with a blue liquid. "Is these being the potion to make the great Harry Potter sir better?"

Hermione took said vials from the house elf and after a moment's inspection, handed them back. "Yes, Dobby, these are the right ones. Can you give them to Harry, then come back here for a moment

"when you're done?" A few moments later, Dobby handed Hermione both vials, now empty. "Dobby, I need to ask you something, but I don't want you to get upset. Why have you been calling me 'Mistress'? I didn't do anything to bind you to me, did I? Not that I don't appreciate your being helpful, but I don't understand what's happened."

Contrary to all her expectations, Dobby did not look put out in the least. If anything, the house elf looked more excited than usual. "Oh no, Mistress, you is not binding Dobby. Dobby is serving the great Harry Potter sir, and he is not wishing to bind Dobby because he fears Mistress would be angry with him. But now that Mistress is binding Winky, Dobby is thinking the great Harry Potter sir will be binding Dobby. Dobby would be most honored to have the great Harry Potter sir as his new Master. But the great Harry Potter sir is not well, and Dobby knows Mistress is caring deeply for him and will be with him always. So Dobby is thinking that if the great Harry Potter sir is Dobby's Master, then you is most certainly Dobby's Mistress until Master is better. So Dobby will obey Mistress until Dobby can ask Master if Dobby is being right."

If it were possible, Hermione's head may have exploded as she attempted to sort out the essential message that Dobby had been trying to convey. Eventually she got it boiled down to three facts: Dobby wanted to bind himself to Harry as Winky did to her, Harry isn't currently capable of telling Dobby what to do, and Dobby deemed Hermione to be an appropriate person to serve temporarily because she would make sure Harry would be taken care of. "Thank you, Dobby. That was... informative. I'll do my best to be a good Mistress for you until Harry's better." Shaking away imaginary cobwebs, she returned her attention to her parents, who were gazing at her slightly stupefied. "Since Harry will be better in the morning, I'm thinking we should pack up the house tonight. That way we can get where we are going in a hurry if necessary."

Frederick had been silent for quite a while now, but decided that he needed to step in. "Pumpkin, how are we going to pack up the entire house in one evening? You can't use magic, remember the rules about underage magic use? You'll certainly get the attention of

someone at the Ministry, and I don't think that's a good idea if we're trying to be discrete."

Hermione's features slumped for a moment before Winky lightly shook her arm. "Mistress, Dobby and Winky can pack everything. We is using elf magic, can make everything small and neat. Winky moved old master's whole house three times in one day when old master's son was little, not so hard for house elves to do it."

Hermione's smile returned as she looked down at her new friend. "Winky, when you say small, do you mean small like two or three trunks, or more than that?"

For the first time that Hermione could ever remember, she saw Winky laugh. Not the hysterical drunkenness of a house elf that had too much butterbeer, but a true laugh of amusement. "Dobby, come here, make yourself useful for Mistress." Once the permanently excitable elf joined her, she whispered something in his ear, then turned back to Hermione. "Mistress, count to three." Both Winky and Dobby started making some strange hand movements.

Feeling a little curious, Hermione did just that. "One... two... thr—my goodness!" Before she had finished counting, she and her parents were standing in a completely barren living room, aside from Harry's hospital bed in the corner, the four trunks of things from Hogwarts, and ten little boxes the size of dinner plates sitting on the floor alongside what looked like a miniaturized version of the family car.

Dobby snapped his fingers and a slightly smaller, but empty, trunk appeared on the floor. Another snap of his fingers saw the ten boxes float their way into the trunk, the car going in last and sitting on top of them, and the lid snapping shut. "Dobby is sorry, Mistress, Dobby hasn't done this in many years, and is forgetting how to do some parts." The elf looked genuinely disappointed that Hermione wasn't showing immediate signs of joy.

The problem was that the Granger family was completely stunned and unable to say anything right away, but Hermione noticed the two elves were starting to appear distressed. "No, no, Dobby, you and

Winky did wonderfully! Did you just pack up the whole entire house? All our things are in that one trunk?"

Winky nodded in agreement, now apparently quite satisfied with herself now that her mistress approved. "Everything except for food, Mistress. Food isn't safe to pack that way, makes everything all messy."

Jane-Marie took the opportunity to make her first attempt to speak to Winky directly. "Winky, this is excellent! You've saved us a lot of time and work. But did you pack all of the furniture? We still need a place to sleep tonight, and I'm guessing you packed our beds, right?"

Winky paused for a moment as she considered the question. "Winky is sorry, she didn't think about that. Give Winky a moment." Winky looked around the room for a minute, then snapped her fingers twice. The living room became a bedroom of sorts, with a large bed against one wall, and two smaller beds against the other, with a nightstand next to each. Harry's hospital bed had vanished, and he was now sleeping in one of the two smaller beds. Scowling for a moment, Winky looked around, trying to remember what she had forgotten; the room still didn't look quite right to her. Realizing what she missed, the house elf gave a small smile as she clapped her hands, and two dividers appeared, one between the two smaller beds, and one across the middle of the floor separating the two smaller beds from the larger one.

Hermione smiled as she nodded in approval, then directed the five non-comatose members of the group to sit together on the larger bed. It took a few moments and some careful phrasing, but she did manage to convince both Dobby and Winky to join the Grangers in taking seats, although both elves carefully situated themselves at the end of the bed and ignored the Granger family as they undertook a furiously paced discussion in low whispers, apparently trying to remain available to assist but not interfere in the family discussion. Finally she looked at her parents as she tried to determine the best way to approach the only major remaining obstacle in their paths not directly related to Harry. "Mum, Dad, I know this is happening really fast, and I've tried my best, but I don't really understand how you can be so calm about this? What are you going to do with the house?

What about your jobs? What I'm trying to say is... well Harry has money, possibly quite a lot of it, but it's not probably enough for the four of us, even short term." Both adult Grangers took one look at their daughter, then at each other, then burst into hysterical laughter. "Mum, Dad, this isn't funny! We're talking about running away from Britain, probably forever!"

Finally Frederick got his mirth under control enough to answer Hermione. "Pumpkin, we don't need to worry about money. We aren't paying those ridiculous tuition and fees to your old school anymore, and even those didn't put a major dent in our savings." A sputtering Hermione couldn't work out a coherent response, so Frederick turned to his wife. "Sweetheart, we have to tell her. You knew this would happen eventually."

An instantly sobered Jane-Marie took both her daughter's hands. "Hermione-dear, I didn't want to tell you this until you were out of school. But you're old enough to know the truth now. Your father and I... we aren't really dentists. We work for the international intelligence services of Britain. The government owns this house, they just let us live here. We're really quite wealthy, and after you got out of school, we were going to move again. The service knows about the plan, and they promised us we can move to a new country whenever we like. You're probably too young to remember, but until just before you turned three, we lived in France. Before you were born, we lived in Switzerland for a year, and before that in America for two. That's where your father was born. I was born here in Britain, and I met him when he came here for college."

Hermione's head was almost literally spinning as she sorted through this new information. "You and Dad... you're spies?"

"Not spies, pumpkin. We work with the intelligence service, but we just work in an office building." Noting her daughter's look of confusion, Frederick thought further explanation was necessary. "The dental practice is owned by the government too, just a cover for our real jobs. Sweetie, how did you think two dentists' salaries would be enough to cover the cost of an education at any private school, much less the exorbitant tuition we've been paying for Hogwarts?"

"I... well, I guess I never really thought about it." Hermione was flushed with embarrassment. She never thought about the possible consequences of her attending Hogwarts extending to anyone beyond herself, and certainly not the tuition costs. "I'm so sorry... I really should have known better... of course Hogwarts costs money. Probably more than you could have afforded really... I was so selfish!"

Seeing tears threatening the corners of her daughter's eyes, Jane-Marie pulled Hermione into an embrace. "It's alright, Hermione, no harm done. In any event, we really don't need to worry about money. Your father and I will make a quick visit to see our boss first thing in the morning, and we'll be finished and back here before you and Harry are even awake. We'll take Harry to the bank, then we can figure out where our new home will be. With any luck at all, we'll be out of Britain before dinner."

"Now I know how much you like planning ahead, so I'll let you know tonight that our boss is going to want us to move to one of our old houses for about a week or two, then we get a bigger list of places to choose from for our next real home." Frederick smiled as he thought about that upcoming conversation, which would last at least a week if he knew his daughter and her penchant for research. "We can stay there for as little as two years, or the rest of our lives, depending on how much we like it. We'll start talking about those tomorrow after the bank, but do you have any preference between France, Switzerland, and America for our temporary place?"

The way Hermione's eyes lit up at the mention of France, her parents were nearly sure that's where she would pick. But once again, her logical thinking and total analysis of the situation yielded a surprising response. "I really would feel a lot better about Harry's safety, and ours, to be quite honest, with an ocean between us and Britain. That and based on what I've read, the magical community in America really dislikes the British magical community. Even if we somehow were found, the Americans probably wouldn't let them do anything to us. Does your boss know about me? Being magical, I mean."

Jane-Marie barely held back a snort of laughter. "They were the ones who told us that you were probably magical to begin with, although

they didn't know any way to test you to find out for sure. As far as they know, the magical world is unaware that they know about it, and only select members of the intelligence services with high level clearances know any details, which are of course covered by the State Secrets Act."

"Do you think they can help us with our move then? I just realized that going through customs with all of these shrunken things could be awkward, never mind the actual magical things Harry and I own." Hermione chewed on her lower lip in frustration. Normally she was the master of planning out her moves in detail, always three or four steps ahead of what she was actually doing. Now that she was being forced to make decisions on the fly, without the time necessary for careful deliberations, she was finding it very difficult to avoid possible pitfalls.

Frederick smiled as he realized what was bothering his only daughter. Too often, her mother had gone through the same processes, at least in the early stages of their relationship before he had gotten her to calm down and let things happen from time to time. "Hermione, there is no way we could leave the country without our boss facilitating it. With our jobs, whatever country we are entering has to be notified that we are coming, and whether it is in our official capacities or just visiting. Not very polite to have people in foreign intelligence just wandering into sovereign nations without any official documentation for being there, or someone might think we really are spies."

Hermione thought she had taken care of everything she could for the moment, until she realized that her parents' boss could actually pose a problem. "What are you going to tell them about Harry? Do they know who he is, in terms of the magical world I mean?"

"The truth, pumpkin. You never get anywhere by lying, or failing to provide all the relevant information." Jane Marie ran her fingers through her daughter's seemingly untamable hair. "I think we can prove that there are serious threats to Harry's well-being if he stays in Britain, and it seems clear that no wizard or witch is going to do anything about it if your former headmaster doesn't care."

"What about his relatives? I know they aren't very nice to Harry, but they're still going to notice when Harry doesn't show up at Kings Cross." Hermione shook her head, disappointed in herself. "Every minute I think more about what happened tonight, there's more and more things I realized I didn't account for."

Frederick frowned as he gazed at Hermione. "Hermione, I know it's bothering you, but you did the best you could. As far as his relatives are concerned..." Glancing over at his wife, he saw an almost imperceptible nod, and he decided he should be completely honest with his daughter. "Hermione, did you ever wonder why Harry's normal clothes never fit right? Why he's so much smaller than the other boys his age? He's barely bigger than you are."

Hermione stared at both her parents for a moment, unsuccessfully trying to glean the purpose of the questions. "He's just small, Dad. He probably hasn't had his growth spurt yet. His clothes... I don't know, I guess I never really noticed, he's always wearing his robes."

"He never talks about his relatives, does he? Probably doesn't talk about anything from their neighborhood at all, right? Not even any friends from before Hogwarts?"

Hermione bit her lip again as she thought about the questions. "No he doesn't. He told me and Ron we were his first ever friends, aside from Hedwig and Hagrid. That's not normal, is it?"

Frederick sighed as he debated how much more he should say, and finally settled on full disclosure. "No, pumpkin, it isn't. There's no easy way to say this, but we think Harry was abused by his relatives. After what you've written in your letters over the last few years, we were suspicious, but when we saw him again tonight, I was absolutely sure of it. At the very least, they didn't feed him enough, and he was probably emotionally abused too. I wouldn't be surprised if they physically abused him too."

Hermione was near tears as she tried to logically analyze what her father was saying, but it was just too difficult. "Why didn't I see this? I know Harry better than anyone, and I couldn't figure out what you knew just from seeing him twice."

"Because he didn't want you to know, Hermione." Jane-Marie hugged her daughter as tight as she could. "Kids who grow up in bad homes, they don't want people to know about it. Your father and I, we knew because we've seen it before. You couldn't recognize something you've never seen, especially if Harry tried to hide it from you."

The young witch sobbed as she thought about what her best friend could have been subjected to. But somewhere in her mind, she realized that despite it all, her parents hadn't addressed her question. "They're still his guardians though. How can we take him out of the country, with your boss knowing we'd be doing something illegal?"

Frederick's wry smile was not truly indicative of how he felt about his actions, but it seemed appropriate enough. "I may have done something that doesn't exactly fall under department protocol a few months back, on the off chance that I might be able to talk to Harry before he had to return to his relatives. Let's just say that the Dursley family will be rather surprised when they return from Kings Cross to find law enforcement officers waiting to question them."

"Oh Frederick, you didn't!" Jane-Marie was torn between wanting to kiss her husband and throttle him. "It isn't as though they wouldn't deserve it if they've actually hurt Harry, but you can't do things like that! If the people at work found out what you did, you would lose your job! Then where would we be?"

The eldest Granger looked over at his wife with a hint of steel in his eyes. "I did the right thing, I'm not going to apologize for it. And it's just as well that we're leaving the country then, isn't it? No one outside this house except our boss knows exactly what happened, and he supports what I did. He told me that if my guess was right, he'd help us through the red-tape to get Harry to stay here with us, at least for this summer. It won't surprise him that we are taking Harry with us after we tell him what's happening in the magical world."

"On that note, I think it's time for bed, Hermione. We can talk about this more tomorrow when your father and I return from the office." Jane-Marie looked down at the foot of the bed to find Dobby and Winky still engrossed in their discussion. "Dobby, Winky?" No sooner

were the words out of her mouth, the house elves were giving her their full attention. “I’m sorry to interrupt, but we’re all going to go to bed now. I didn’t see beds made up for the two of you though. Do you sleep with Harry and Hermione in their beds?”

Winky shot to her feet and pulled Dobby down to the floor with her. “Oh no, ma’am. Winky and Dobby be sleeping in the closet, like proper house elves.” Dobby nodded fervently in agreement and the two were about to head off to the now emptied pantry to settle down before they were halted by a hand on each of their shoulders.

The pair turned around to see Hermione bending over in front of them. “No, Winky, that’s not acceptable. House elves that serve me or Harry will have their own rooms with proper beds. It’s disrespectful for someone who’s part of my family to be living in a closet because it tells other people that I think you’re not worthy of your own private space.” Hermione smiled just a little as Dobby looked a little puzzled, but neither he nor Winky voiced any objection. “I know we don’t have rooms for you tonight, but could you make some beds for yourselves like you did for my parents, Harry, and me? You can put up screens too if you like, but I want you to stay in this room with us.”

Dobby opened his mouth to speak and was promptly swatted in the back of the head by Winky. “Yes, Mistress, Winky is doing as Mistress wants. Dobby will listen to Mistress too, or Master will be upset in the morning.” That got Dobby’s immediate compliance, and moments later, everyone was tucked in for the night.

The next morning, Harry was quite confused to wake up in a bed in an unfamiliar room he knew was definitely not in any part of the Hogwarts castle. But before he could do anything beyond retrieving his glasses from the nightstand, he felt a moderate weight fall on top of his legs. Shaking clear the mental cobwebs, Harry’s focus on the new addition yielded quite the surprise. “Dobby! Where are we, and why are you sitting on my legs?”

“Master needs to be quiet, Mistress is still sleeping. Mistress’s parents be coming back soon.” Dobby’s conspiratorial whisper gained a confused nod of acknowledgement from Harry, so the house elf continued. “We is in Mistress’s house. When Mistress’s parents come

back, Mistress wants to take Master to the bank to get Master's things from the goblins, then Mistress and Mistress's parents is taking Master to a new house far away."

"Alright... umm, I have two very important questions, Dobby. First, why are you calling me 'Master?' Second, who is this 'Mistress?' I thought you served Hogwarts." Harry was growing more confused instead of less, and that was slightly worrisome. But at the moment, there was no sign of any imminent danger, so he was content to just ask questions in the hope of figuring out what happened to him.

Dobby shook his head and frowned. "No, Dobby serves the great Harry Potter sir, and Dobby is calling him Master because that is what he is. Mistress is you's friend with the messy hair. Dobby has been taking orders from Mistress to protect Master because Master was sick and not able to give orders himself. Dobby knows Mistress would do anything to help Master, so Dobby was listening to Mistress until he could ask Master if Dobby should continue listening to Mistress. Is Dobby pleasing Master?"

It took a moment for Harry to wrap his mind around Dobby's explanation, but when he realized that the elf was referring to Hermione, and concluded that this must be her parents' house, it only brought more questions to mind. "Dobby, what happened last night after the Minister left? My memory is kind of fuzzy, probably from the Dreamless Sleep potion, and I'm not sure why I'm here and not at Hogwarts."

Dobby tittered for a moment as he debated how to proceed. "Dobby is sorry, Master, but Dobby is not sure what to say. Dobby is thinking Master should be asking Mistress, but Dobby will tell as best Dobby can if Master wishes." At a slow nod from Harry, Dobby chewed on his finger for a moment before speaking again. "Master's dog-friend came to see Master in hospital, and the greasy one was angry when Master's dog-friend changed to human form. The greasy one used the bad curse on Master's dog-friend, and he died. Master had so many potions in him that Master did not do anything but stare, and Dobby thinks Master was very upset. Mistress lost control of her magic and it attacked everyone except Master. Mistress was so very angry at the greasy one, but even more angry when the old man said

that the greasy one was not in trouble for killing Master's dog-friend. Mistress called for Dobby and told Dobby to take Master someplace safe and not tell anyone where Dobby is going. So Dobby is taking Master to house of Mistress's parents, since wizards looking for Dobby and Master would look in places they know Dobby knows of, but they isn't knowing Dobby knows this house. Then Mistress made the hospital locked so no one can come and go, then Mistress came here with her things, Master's things, and Winky. Dobby helped Winky pack all of the things in Mistress's house into a trunk. Mistress and her parents want to move far far away, and they is wanting Master to come with them because they is thinking it is not safe for Master to stay."

As Harry heard Dobby's tale and remembered the death of his godfather, he broke down in tears. The last link to his parents besides Professor Lupin was gone, and the werewolf had disappeared from Harry's life over a year ago. When he realized that the headmaster had officially sanctioned Snape's use of an Unforgivable to destroy that link, for no reason that Harry was aware of (other than the fact that the two hated each other), he knew he could never go back to Hogwarts. If Snape could use the Killing Curse on Sirius without repercussion, especially when there was absolutely no provocation, it would only be a matter of time before Snape made up his mind to kill Harry too. When he heard what Hermione had done, Harry decided that he didn't care what he had to do, he would not leave Hermione's side as long as she was willing to have him. She had endangered her own life for his, and those of her parents, without reservation and in spite of the likely consequences. There was no one else in the world except for his parents, Cedric, and Sirius, all of whom were now deceased, who had ever done that for him, and that alone was worth his loyalty and service. Ron had turned his back on Harry at the beginning of this year, and Harry knew deep down that Ron still resented Harry's successes and achievements, in spite of all they cost him. No one else really knew Harry; they knew the Boy-Who-Lived, the star Gryffindor Seeker, or in some cases, the Tri-Wizard Champion. Harry quickly corrected himself; there was one exception: Neville Longbottom. While the pair were not the closest of friends, Harry knew that Neville only saw Harry when the blonde-haired teen looked at him from across the dorm room, and the two respected each other.

Harry was so caught up in his thoughts that he completely failed to notice Dobby leave and Hermione walk around the screen that separated her bed from his and walk up to his side. "How are you feeling, Harry? I'm afraid I don't have any more of the anti-Cruciatus potion, we gave you the last bit we had last night."

Harry snapped to attention at the sound of his best friend's voice. "Hermione... I... I actually feel fine physically, no pain. I'm... well... I don't know."

The slightly older teen sat down on the bed at Harry's side and took his hands in hers. "Harry, I'm sorry... so unbelievably sorry... but I couldn't stay there, and I couldn't leave you behind." Hermione's voice wavered with insecurity; she knew he had every right to be furious with her, she had practically kidnapped him from Hogwarts. "Please forgive me, but I was only trying to help..."

"It's alright, Hermione, you did the right thing." Harry looked at his distraught best friend, not sure how to comfort her. "Dobby explained what happened, and I think you've got the right of it. The only people in Britain who really truly matter to me are you and Dobby... well Professor Lupin too, but he's disappeared. Everyone else, either they can't decide if I'm a hero or the next Voldemort, or they can't be trusted. After last night, I bet Snape could murder me in my sleep and Dumbledore would just let him off." Harry summoned up his courage the best he could, and decided he had no choice but to ask, and damn the consequences. "There's nothing left for me here, so if you're leaving Britain, I want to come with you! Would you let me?"

Hermione didn't speak, but the expression on her face told Harry everything; she would be glad to have his company. She simply pulled herself up further onto the bed and crawled over on top of Harry, straddling his torso, and engulfed him in one of her tightest hugs. Burying her face in his shoulder, Hermione let loose all of her fears of rejection and the tears that had building in her for the past twelve hours. Her friend wasn't angry with her rash decision, and was asking if he could stay with her.

For his part, Harry closed his eyes and, for the first time in days, he truly smiled. To him, as long as he had his best friend at his side, nothing else mattered.

So immersed in their own world, the pair failed to notice the return of the Granger parents to the house. "Pumpkin, you're a little too young to be making me a grandfather." Frederick had seen his daughter and her friend in what could be considered a compromising position and thought he'd have a little fun with her.

Harry panicked as he realized who the likely speaker was and what he might be thinking seeing Hermione in his lap, but he was unable to do much of anything without risking dumping his best friend on the floor. So he settled on poking Hermione in the ribs to get her attention.

There was no need for that though, as the comment finally processed in her brain, and Hermione practically flew off of him. Walking over to her father, she promptly smacked him on the arm. "Daddy, you shouldn't scare Harry like that, he probably almost wet himself. And there was absolutely nothing inappropriate going on either, I was just happy that Harry agreed to come with us." Not that I would mind if he were doing any such thing, but I doubt he'd want to...

After quickly checking to make sure his hospital gown was properly fastened, Harry made to get out of bed and greet the Granger parents properly. Unfortunately, his legs were not cooperating right away, and it took a minute to steady himself. "Mister and Missus Granger, I'm so sorry—"

Jane-Marie cut him off right there. "No, Harry, don't apologize for things that aren't your fault. Given what our daughter told us about last night, I am happy that you are both safe, and even more pleased that Hermione no longer wishes to remain in Britain. Her father and I were very concerned about her safety over the past four years, and if bringing you with us is what it takes to convince Hermione, that's what we'll do." Her voice softened for a moment as she walked to his side and put an arm over his shoulders. "From what Hermione has told us, your godfather meant a great deal to you, didn't he? I'm very sorry that he was murdered. When we have some time, and you're ready, maybe you'd like to tell us more about him?"

Harry nodded solemnly, determined not to cry. "If you like, Missus Granger. Sirius was special, and it hurts that I only had a little while with him. But Sirius wouldn't want me to be sad, because he gets to see my mum and dad now."

Hermione's heart broke in that moment. She knew better than anyone when Harry was bottling up his feelings, and she could tell he was doing it again. She had to change the subject. "Harry, we need to get ready to go to the bank. I've been thinking about things, and I don't think Dumbledore was being honest with you about your money. If nothing else, we at least need to get all the money out of your vault so we can put it in a new bank where we move to."

Harry thought for a moment before calling for Dobby. "Dobby, can you get me some clothes and my shoes from wherever you put my trunk yesterday?" Unbeknownst to Harry, all five of the trunks (the Granger house trunk, his, Hermione's, and the two from Snape's office) were simply stacked in the next room from the night before.

"Is Master wanting muggle clothes or wizard clothes?" The elf had appeared nearly instantaneously at the sound of his name.

Harry looked at Hermione for an answer, who promptly furrowed her brow in thought. "Dobby, is it possible for you and Winky to bring the four of us from here to Diagon Alley, or maybe the Leaky Cauldron?"

Dobby nodded enthusiastically. "Dobby and Winky is being able. Master will be wanting wizard clothes then?" At a nod from Harry, he clapped his hands and the needed articles appeared in a neat pile on the bed behind him, along with two larger hooded over-robies in grey. "Mistress must hide her parents while they is walking in the streets. Grownups in muggle clothing will be drawing attention."

"Excellent suggestion, Dobby. Thank you very much." Hermione could tell the elf was nearly swooning at the praise, and told herself she had to remember to talk with both elves about proper treatment of sentient beings when all of their affairs were settled.

When the group returned from Gringott's three hours later, they were surprised to find every surface in the house sparkling. Winky explained that it would not do for house elves to be standing around in Diagon Alley being unproductive, and the pair had come back to clean in the meantime, only returning to Diagon Alley just in time to pick up Harry and the Grangers. Needless to say, both Dobby and Winky were quite pleased with themselves and in good moods.

By contrast, the human members of the group were not happy to say the least. The Granger parents were very much in awe of what they had learned about Harry's financial status; they were comfortably wealthy, but Harry's resources far outstripped their own by more than a full order of magnitude, if not close to two. Now they had the responsibility of helping Harry manage this immense wealth, as he was in no condition or otherwise prepared to do it himself. Hermione was absolutely fuming about another of Dumbledore's machinations that the goblins were aware of, but unable to do anything about. Harry was just plain sad, thinking about the fact that he was now rich beyond measure, but at the cost of the three adults which cared for him most. He knew instinctually on some level that the Grangers cared, possibly as much as Professor Lupin had before he went away, but they weren't Sirius, and certainly not his parents.

Hermione noticed Harry's quietness, and set aside her anger for a moment, concerned at her best friend's behavior and fairly sure she knew what was causing it. "Harry, it's not your fault. I know you'd give up every last galleon to have them back, even if it wasn't for very long. But you know all of them loved you very much, and that's why they left you this money, to make sure you could take care of yourself."

The group had been quite astonished to learn upon their arrival that the goblins were aware of both Sirius's innocence and his death. The goblins had apparently been telling the Ministry for years an innocent man was in Azkaban, but they were ignored. When Sirius had learned that Gringott's employees were not going to kill him on sight, he had made what turned out to be a very prudent decision to change his will. Last updated just before the events at Godric's Hollow, the previous beneficiaries were James Potter, Remus Lupin, and Peter Pettigrew in equal shares. Sirius subsequently changed it to give Remus twenty percent, the disowned Andromeda Tonks nee Black

fifteen percent for her family, and the rest to be held in trust for Harry until his twenty-fifth birthday, then allowed the goblins to charm his will to be directly linked to his soul by blood magic, so that if he passed on, Gringott's would know immediately and be able to notify the beneficiaries. Considering he was a wanted fugitive whom the Ministry had tried to covertly execute by means of the Dementor's Kiss only a year before, and given the opportunity, any Death Eater would kill him on sight and certainly not do him the service of a public funeral, this measure was a pretty good idea in his opinion, and the notices had been prepared to be sent out the next morning.

"I know that, Hermione. But..." Harry trailed off as he sat against one of the walls staring blankly across the room. "It's just one more thing that makes me different than everyone else, another thing I didn't ask for and don't want, just like my bloody scar and my stupid fame."

Hermione let herself slide down the wall she had been leaning against to seat herself next to Harry and leaned up against his side. "Being different doesn't have to be a bad thing, Harry. You're much different than any of the boys at Hogwarts, because honestly most of them are horribly mean or quite stupid. You're not like them, and I like you just the way you are, rich or poor, famous or nameless."

"Thanks..." Harry took a noticeable breath before turning his head to look down at his best friend, whose own head was now leaning on his shoulder. "You still worked up about Dumbledore?" At the piercing glare, Harry nodded and turned away again to face the opposite wall. "Right, stupid question. Although, aside from the fact that he successfully hoodwinked both the goblins and the Wizengamot by using each others' rules against both groups, according to the letter of the law, he hadn't actually done anything illegal yet."

Hermione raised an eyebrow in concern. "Yet? Harry, be realistic, he successfully convinced the Wizengamot that Gringott's upheld the sanctity of wills as a serious pillar of the banking community, then turned around and told the goblins that as head of the Wizengamot he was issuing an executive order to bar the unsealing of your parent's will with the threat of a war between goblins and wizards if it was breached! Then if that wasn't enough, he went back to the Wizengamot and told them that since the will wasn't going to be

opened according to Gringott's officials, he was taking custody of you and, in the interests of your personal safety, placing you with a family outside of Ministry procedures, then proceeded to do everything in his power to keep you ignorant of both your true family and the magical world. Do you honestly think he would just accept the order sent from Gringott's that you must be informed of your inheritance by the unsealing of the will at some point prior to your fifteenth birthday? What were the goblins going to do to Dumbledore if he refused? Start a war with all wizard-kind with the so-called Leader of the Light playing the injured party? And let's not forget he's shielding a murderer!"

Harry considered this for a moment before coming to the conclusion that Hermione was probably right. "I guess I just don't see the point in throwing a fit over something I can't change. Don't get me wrong, I'm plenty angry about this, but at this point, there's nothing else we can do. None of my personal property or money was stolen, and all of my assets are sitting in that trunk over there." Harry had decided to liquidate the three properties he held by selling them to Gringott's and allowing them to find a buyer on their own time, so the magically enhanced trunk to which he referred now contained a great deal of gold in one compartment, and a small number of family heirlooms and books in the other. "Hopefully after today, we'll never step foot in Britain ever again, and if we're really lucky, we'll never have to deal with any of the people that tried to take advantage of us ever again."

A few hours, a wardrobe change, and a brief meal later, Harry and the Grangers found themselves being transported via house elf to the offices where Frederick and Jane-Marie worked for the past ten years. They were met by a man in his late fifties or early sixties, who introduced himself only as "the section chief." After a brief conversation, wherein it was explained that the group had picked the house in the United States as their temporary residence and the accompanying five trunks contained all they needed to take with them, the Grangers' boss led the four visible members of the party (as well as both house elves keeping an invisible guard) downstairs to an SUV. The aforementioned trunks had previously been loaded onto a cart, and as such, were easily loaded into the back of the large vehicle. A short while later, Harry experienced his first ride in an airplane as the group took a privately chartered flight to Chicago.

Dobby and Winky had decided to forgo the airplane experience and simply used their method of elf-travel to rejoin them. Two hours later, all six were safely installed in the former apartment of "Daniel" and "Emiliana" Granger, with enough of their amenities from their former home in Britain unpacked to make the place livable for a two week stay, and everyone was so exhausted that nothing else was accomplished that evening, all fast asleep by eight in the evening local time.

Back in Britain, 24 hours earlier

Rita Skeeter was so excited by what she had just witnessed that if she had been in her true form, she would have almost certainly needed a new set of underwear for having wet herself. The past hour sitting on the window sill of the hospital wing in her animagus form was more than worth the price of a few stiff joints. There was enough here for practically an entire issue of the Prophet! Cornelius Fudge, and by extension the Ministry, was denying the return of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, in spite of some very convincing evidence to the contrary, for simple political expedience. Albus Dumbledore had been harboring a known fugitive, Sirius Black, who according to the teens in the room was apparently not guilty of the crimes he had been accused of. Severus Snape had used an Unforgivable on said fugitive without any provocation to murder said fugitive, and the great Dumbledore seemed content to ignore it, with the mother Weasley happy to let him. Then the Granger girl threw a spectacular hissy-fit, complete with an outburst of uncontrolled magic, and after some accusations of other improprieties against Potter by Dumbledore, she got some house elf to spirit Potter away from the castle for parts unknown. Rita thought it was odd that a muggle-born like Granger would be on such good terms with a house elf, especially given the rumors she heard about some nonsense "spew" group, but in the grand scheme of things it wasn't important. The girl then had the audacity to kick the aforementioned Snape in the face, grab Potter's bag of gold from the tournament, and then leave the hospital wing herself. Unfortunately, whatever she did after she slammed the doors behind her sealed all of the windows closed too, or Rita would have been happily flying off to go write some stories for the Prophet. Little did Rita know that she was about to witness even more scandalous behavior.

Dumbledore got up from the floor where he had fallen from the strength of Hermione's outburst and dusted himself off. Looking over at Sirius Black's lifeless body, then at his potions master and spy, whose face was continuing to bloody the floor despite the wizard having fallen unconscious, and finally at Molly and Ron Weasley, who were staring at him in absolute shock, the headmaster shook his head in disappointment. "No, this will not do. Not at all... Somnus." The elder wizard casually put the pair to sleep with a flick of his wrist, then transfigured the still warm body of Harry's godfather into a bone. He thought it was rather ironic considering it was the same fate as the man who had placed the recently deceased in Azkaban without trial all those years ago. A well placed Evanescos vanished the bone to the middle of the acromantula den in the Forbidden Forest, and finally he was free to see to the head of Slytherin. Some rudimentary healing charms allowed for the cessation of bleeding and some pain reduction, although the nasal cartilage broken would have to wait for a more experienced hand. "Ennervate. Severus, was that really necessary? I know the two of you disliked each other, but an Unforgivable while his back was turned?"

"Bugger Black... he deserved it. Now where is that mud-blood bitch? I feel an overwhelming urge to return her courtesy." Snape was fuming, and if it was possible, his lily white skin seemed even more pasty than normal.

Dumbledore rolled his eyes as he walked over to the infirmary doors. "Really Severus, what did you expect? You just killed her best friend's godfather right in front of the pair of them, with absolutely no provocation. Frankly, I think you should consider yourself fortunate not to be more gravely injured. And you really must learn to control your impulses, it's becoming increasingly more difficult to fend off awkward questions. Miss Greengrass complained to her parents that she was having periods of lost memories, and the healers at St. Mungo's were able to determine she's been memory-charmed more than once." Snape only gave a raised eyebrow in response as he pulled himself to his feet. "I really wish you would control yourself, Severus." As soon as Dumbledore put his hand on the doorknob, he was forced to withdraw it, the hand burning in agony until he numbed it with a charm. "Clever girl, that Miss Granger. She must have

realized she would need a head start to get to the Ministry and report the death of Sirius before I did something to stop her. Not that it will do her any good, the only one there who might even consider hearing her out is Madame Bones, and she won't be there at this hour." The headmaster cast a number of spells at the door, but to no avail, as it remained firmly shut. Walking over to a window, then the fireplace, he found all methods of leaving the room magically sealed. "Severus, I fear we will be staying here for quite some time. Whatever she did, Miss Granger was quite thorough."

Snape frowned, not quite believing what he'd heard. "Surely that can't be the case, Headmaster. She's only a fourth year student. How can she have generated enough power in whatever spell this is that you cannot overcome it?"

Dumbledore would have laughed if the situation wasn't so horribly inconvenient. "I believe she must have used some form of rune warding scheme, and by using her own blood to write and seal the runes, she has made them immeasurably strong. There is good reason the Ministry banned the practice in Britain. Not because it is a Dark Art as they publicly claim, as such magic isn't even the least bit dark, but because of the enormous power you can summon."

"Ha! Finally I get a chance to expel the little-know-it-all! With any luck she'll be in Azkaban by week's end." Snape looked positively gleeful.

Dumbledore frowned as he looked over at his colleague. "Severus, firstly it is not within your prerogative to do any such thing. Second, it's no more serious a violation than violating the underage magic laws, as she was at Hogwarts when she did this, and as you well know, Miss Granger's spotless record would probably result in her being let off with a warning. At the very most, a fine would be assessed, but certainly not expulsion, much less a prison sentence. We really need to work on this, Severus. I understand you need some leeway in order to convince Tom and his Death Eaters you are on their side, but I can't have you just doing whatever you please."

Snape grumbled under his breath for a moment before deciding to change the subject. "Headmaster, what do you intend to do about those two?" He was gesturing in the general direction of the

unconscious Molly and Ron, but he decided it was beneath him to refer to them by name.

Dumbledore thoughtfully stroked his beard for a moment. “I suppose we will need to modify their memories. It will need to be at least somewhat believable though, or they may start to fight the charm and remember what truly occurred. Perhaps we should suggest that when I introduced Sirius, he was polite until he saw you, at which point he forced you into a duel. You were injured, but when he began using lethal spells, you responded in kind and unfortunately Sirius was killed. At this point, Harry flew into a terrible rage and caused an enormous surge of accidental magic, causing the four of us to fall unconscious, and when we awoke, both Harry and Miss Granger had already left.”

Snape saw no obvious holes in the fabrication. “That should be adequate. Now what are we to do while we wait for someone to get us out of here?”

“We must prioritize our goals. There is much to do, and we mustn’t waste time.” Dumbledore conjured a pair of plush armchairs and the two wizards sat down to plan. “We must find both Harry and Miss Granger and ensure their safety until the next school term.” Neither mentioned the memory charm that would be put in place to correspond with the story fabricated for Molly and Ron, but it was understood. “We must also mobilize the Order of the Phoenix once more. Since the Minister is determined to deny the return of Tom Riddle, we must prepare ourselves without expecting any help from the Ministry.” Dumbledore paused for a moment to collect his thoughts before continuing. “We also need money... this war will not come cheaply. Harry’s departure could not have come at a more inconvenient time. He needs to be brought to Gringott’s before the end of July or I fear the goblins will be quite angry, as they are already displeased I have not arranged for Harry to visit their offices before now.” Dumbledore stroked his beard again as he mused aloud. “On the other hand, perhaps in the wake of Tom’s return, Harry will be more easily convinced to allow us access to the Potter family vaults to finance our work.”

Britain, Summer of 1995 through 2005

Needless to say, both Dumbledore and Snape would be far from pleased when they discovered exactly how little of their scheming would go as planned. In the end, the only bit that worked out from their plans was the memory modification of Molly and Ron. The Grangers and Harry were long out of the country before they even had a chance to search for the wayward students. Fudge actually pre-empted Dumbledore by issuing a Ministry decree that very evening, banning private militias with a stay in Azkaban for violators, and in his press conference the following morning, cited the Order of the Phoenix by name as a group of vigilantes whose actions against respected citizens such as Lucius Malfoy in the first war were inexcusable. Of course, this put a major damper on recruiting new members, and as more than half the group had died during the first war, the remaining former members were in a deep hole. And of course, with Harry out of contact, and the goblins steadfastly refusing to take a meeting with him, Dumbledore was quickly losing financial traction as well.

When Rita Skeeter finally got all her metaphorical ducks in a row two weeks later, nearly three-quarters of a full issue were dedicated to her various stories gleaned from her covert observances. She left no one untouched, save Harry and Hermione, who she thought had suffered quite enough that evening and according to her sources were no longer even in Britain. Taking pot-shots at any teenager who had watched someone close to him murdered, never mind that it was the Boy-Who-Lived, was a line even Rita didn't dare cross, although she couldn't help but insinuate that his disappearance did happen to coincide with that of Hermione. Minister Fudge was criticized for a great number of things, including having Barty Crouch Jr. kissed by a dementor without his testimony being preserved, and denying the return of the Dark Lord despite numerous persons testifying that Harry had indeed told the truth. After her research determined that Sirius Black never had a trial, and on the reactions of Dumbledore and the three minors in the room to Black's reappearance in the hospital wing and the lack of any threat posed by Black, Rita gave serious consideration to the possibility that he was not in fact guilty, and wrote as much, noting that apparently Gringott's also agreed the man was innocent. In a separate article, she detailed Snape's murder of Black with an Unforgivable while the man's back was turned, and

emphasized that Black was not only completely unthreatening in his actions, but also not armed with a wand. But Rita saved her best for the headmaster, with four articles covering six pages detailing his complicity in covering up the above-mentioned murder, his plans to resurrect the now prohibited Order of the Phoenix, and Dumbledore's troubles with Gringott's, both related to Harry Potter and trying to use his own money to bankroll the Order. It had taken a hefty amount of gold, but Rita thought the information she got from the goblins was well worth it. Keeping Potter ignorant of his heritage and inheritance would have been bad enough, but asking the goblins to release the money in his vaults to Dumbledore because the headmaster "was of the opinion that Mister Potter would be doing it himself if he were not temporarily incapacitated" made the bankers more than a little upset, considering they knew their customer was no longer in the country.

All-in-all, the Daily Prophet ended up having to print twice their normal distribution of papers in order to satisfy demand. A great deal of Wizarding Britain was very angry at the Ministry and its representative Fudge, Dumbledore, and Snape, but at the same time, very fearful of the supposed return of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. To say that wizarding society was in upheaval would be putting it mildly. Foreign nations, the French in particular, were outraged when they received their international editions late in the day. Within hours, there were demands that Snape be arrested and tried before the Wizengamot, but the Ministry temporarily quashed those efforts, since calls for Harry Potter and Hermione Granger to testify, the supposed primary eye witnesses according to Skeeter, went unanswered. Eventually, Snape would become a fugitive, and hidden under a Fidelius charm, continued to carry out his duties as mater spy for both sides, although Dumbledore had publicly proclaimed that he had no knowledge of where Snape has run off to. After a week, there were calls for the removal of Fudge and Dumbledore from all governmental positions. In summation, the turmoil Rita has caused was bringing the government down around its leaders' ears.

With the Ministry in chaos and the entire nation destabilizing, it only took six weeks for Lord Voldemort to insinuate lackeys into a few key positions at the Ministry. Seeing the writing on the wall, one month after Rita's article, the International Confederation of Wizards declared Magical Britain to be in a state of civil war, and suspended

all forms of British participation in international government until the conflict was resolved. Magical Britain was also declared a quarantined area, and no one was allowed to leave the country without express permission of their destination country and heavy screenings at international apparition points. Dumbledore lost his position as chair of the ICW, and Fudge remained in office only by declaring a state of martial law and dissolving the Wizengamot.

Dumbledore and his supporters went to ground and set up Hogwarts as the bastion of their defense. The only ones who still followed him without question were some members of the Weasley family. Ron and Molly refused to believe that Dumbledore memory-charmed them, and the headmaster insisted that Rita's version of events was completely falsified, so of course Arthur and Ginny followed suit. Ron was particularly perturbed at Harry and Hermione, and from the way he was often heard talking about them, one would have a hard time believing they were ever friends. Bill and Charlie were no longer in Britain and thus their loyalties went unquestioned, while Percy was busy sycophantically hanging on Fudge's coattails. The twins, on the other hand, knew the truth when they saw it, and when Harry and Hermione had still failed to return by the third week of August, they were thoroughly convinced that, for once, Skeeter had told the truth. Outraged at what had been done to Sirius, and by extension Harry, the pair decided that at first opportunity they would be glad to cut ties with their supposed family and follow Harry's good example of leaving Britain.

Over the next five years, followers loyal to the Dark Lord wormed their way into positions of influence, and slowly but surely, Lord Voldemort set the stage for his eventual coup to take full control of the government. The Dark Lord had realized early on that if he kept quiet and allowed the infighting to proceed, Wizarding Britain would continue to destabilize, to the point that he could eventually take power without facing serious opposition. Finally, on August 31st, 2000, Death Eaters formally took full control of the Ministry. All opposition was now solely based in Hogwarts, where Dumbledore closed the school in order to use the heavily warded castle as a sanctuary. No one outside his most loyal followers trusted him anymore, but Hogwarts was the only place safe from Death Eater

infiltrations, so given the options, most took him up on his offer of protection.

Lord Voldemort's first action as self-installed dictator was to declare all persons taking up residence in Hogwarts enemies of the state and the rightful government of Wizarding Britain, and demand that they withdraw from his school so that he could begin educating children in the proper fashions befitting members of the wizarding world. When Dumbledore and his protectates refused, the Dark Lord simply began sending his Death Eaters out of raids, killing any muggle-borns and any half-bloods which did not flock to his cause, without mercy. Thousands of people died, and this was before the Dark Lord allowed his followers to attack muggles as well, provided they weren't caught. Thousands more were slaughtered over the following five years.

** A small island off the coast of New Zealand, noon local time on October 31st, 2005**

"Mistress Granger, Mistress Potter, there is being people on the island uninvited." Winky scurried to Hermione's side while her mother looked on, somewhat concerned, but still amused by the house elf's mode of address, even after years of encouragement not to be so formal.

Hermione, on the other hand, was not pleased. "Winky, are they in the area that Harry designed? Or have they found some way to escape?"

Winky shook her head. "Winky is not being sure if all are still in the area, but they is seeming to all together, and the group is still in the area."

"That's alright, Winky. You did the right thing. Can you go and watch them, and come let me know if any of them get out? Most importantly, make sure you stay safe, and don't let yourself be seen." Hermione's brow furrowed in concentration as Winky nodded and popped away. "Dobby, could you please come here for a moment?" Hermione's summons was answered immediately, and when the elf arrived, Hermione put on a forced smile as she looked down at him. "Can you

please get Harry for me, tell him he needs to come see me right away? It's very important."

Dobby knew that tone of voice quite well. It was the "Mistress Hermione is agitated" voice, and only prompt compliance with her request would do anything to alleviate it. "Right away, Mistress Hermione!" And nearly as quickly as he arrived, Dobby was gone again.

Moments later, Harry appeared with her father. "What's wrong, sweetheart? Dobby said you were upset."

"Winky tells me there are uninvited guests, and they have been contained on your platform, as far as she is aware." Hermione did her best to remain calm, but a hint of anger was evident. "I'll give you three guesses who they are and why they are here."

Harry shook his head. "Only need one... next time I see that moron Kiwi or one of his ministry counterparts I'm going to beat the snot out of him. No one else even knows this place exists except the goblins, and they wouldn't dare violate our privacy." Harry strode back outside after indicating Hermione should observe the coming confrontation via camera in the house's security center. He wasn't taking any chances with his pregnant wife, and once the Granger family was on their way to safety, Harry made his way down the path at a leisurely pace.

Reaching the clearing he had made at the edge of the island, he was not overly surprised by who was present on the raised platform, which was surrounded by a twelve-foot high chain link fence and a semi-translucent barrier. "I wouldn't touch that fence if I were you, unless of course you like being electrocuted. I suppose it's too much to hope that this is a social visit?" Dumbledore made to speak, but Harry raised his hand and fixed the old man with a heavy glare to stop him. "Not you... you lost all right to address me when you decided that your supposed spy was allowed to kill my godfather without provocation or consequence. Actually, just so that there aren't any misunderstandings... Accio wands." Harry smirked as the seven occupants of the platform yielded ten wands, and flicked a silencing charm at his former headmaster. "I'm not entirely sure that magical

suppression field works as well as I'd like, so I'd rather not take chances. Now who would like to explain what it is you think you are all doing here?"

The group, which consisted of Dumbledore, Rubeus Hagrid, Minerva McGonagall, Molly and Ginny Weasley, Filius Flitwick, and Amelia Bones, conversed in whispers for a few moments, trying to decide which of them was least likely to upset the former Hogwarts student. Ultimately they decided to select the one person in the group Harry had never met. "My name is Amelia Bones, Mister Potter, and we came here at the behest of former Headmaster Dumbledore. He was quite insistent that in order to win the war against the Dark Lord, we need to convince you to return to Britain." Harry stared at the former Director of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement for almost half a minute before breaking out into laughter. "Mister Potter, I fail to see what you find so amusing. Thousands of people have died, and many more will die if we do not stop this madman."

Harry finally got himself controlled enough to look at Amelia with a straight face and answer her. "I'm sorry, but I think I just heard you say that Dumbledore believes someone with no practical experience in fighting Death Eaters, and hasn't even been in your country in over ten years, is somehow going to waltz back into Britain and Voldemort will just surrender? I must have misheard you."

Amelia was not amused in the least. "Don't be foolish, Mister Potter! You know about the prophecy, why else would we have spent the past ten years searching for you?"

"What prophecy?" Harry was at least a little curious now. "And how did you even find me anyway? This island is unplotable and only known to the Magical Ministry of New Zealand except for the people who live here. The Minister gave me his personal assurance that the location would not be given to anyone, and the only reason the entire island isn't under a Fidelius is to allow Ministry personnel to assist if we were to need medical assistance."

Amelia raised an eyebrow as she contemplated the young man in front of her. "Gringott's sold us the information we required. If I were

in your place, I would be very upset with them, but we had no choice. And don't treat me like a first-year, Mister Potter, you know as well as I do that you are prophesized to be the only individual to defeat the Dark Lord."

Harry was more than a bit upset at this point, and it was all he could do to force himself to remain polite. "No, Madame Bones, actually I don't know anything about any prophecy, and even if I did, why the bloody hell would I bother to save a society that can't decide if I'm a glory-seeker or a tragic hero, someone to lionize or someone to vilify? A society that would allow murderers to walk free because they know the right people to bribe or coerce, and yet condemns innocents to prison without a trial? And worst of all, a society where privileged bigots and power-hungry tyrants can oppress anyone they choose?"

"Enough of this foolishness, Harry Potter, you will not disrespect—" But Molly never finished her sentence, as Harry flicked a quick silencing spell at her, and one at her daughter for good measure.

"Mrs. Weasley, you are trespassing on private property, and are currently being held at my pleasure. I will show respect to those who deserve it. And don't think I am unaware of the general activities in Britain... I've heard exactly what your youngest son and daughter have called my wife and what vicious false rumors they've spread. Frankly, I thought I was quite restrained not to kill Ginny on sight for her disrespect." Harry brought his attention back to Amelia, but not before sending Ginny a hateful glare. "Now before I was interrupted... I was asking you why I should help you? And I will reiterate that I know nothing of any prophecy, although I suppose I shouldn't be surprised. When I still lived in Britain, I never was privy to any important information until it was far past too late."

Amelia stared back at Harry, and after a moment's study, she knew he was telling the truth. "Mister Potter, I cannot imagine why this information was not given to you sooner, but I suppose it falls to me to inform you." She quoted the prophecy verbatim for Harry, who only shook his head disdainfully. "So now you see, Mister Potter, the Dark Lord marked you as his equal the night he gave you that scar. The power the Dark Lord knows not is what we need to end this war."

Harry frowned as he studied Amelia. “You still haven’t given me a good reason to help you. Even if this prophecy says that I am capable, it does not say that I will win. Why should I give up my life for people who would cower behind me, offer me up as a human sacrifice? People who represent everything I hated when I lived in Britain?”

“Because it is your task, Mister Potter.” His former head of house and Transfiguration professor spoke aloud for the first time. “It is yours and no one else’s. Either must die at the hand of the other. There is no alternative.”

Harry only smirked as he turned to face her directly. “Coming from someone who once told me that Divination was ‘one of the most imprecise branches of magic,’ that hardly holds much weight, Professor McGonagall. But you still haven’t given me a reason.”

Hagrid took it as his turn to plead. “Now, ‘Arry, you’ve got to do this, or we’re all doomed!”

“Hagrid, how can you defend a society that expelled you from school, and later imprisoned you in Azkaban, for something you never did? A society that is prejudiced towards you because of who your parents were?” Harry looked for understanding in the half-giant’s eyes, but found none. He was too loyal to Dumbledore to be able to think any other way. “How about you, Professor Flitwick? Anything to say? For what it’s worth, I always liked you.”

“No, Mister Potter. I would not be here except that Dumbledore requested my preference. I would have preferred to respect your privacy.” The diminutive Charms professor gave Harry his most serious look to reinforce his statement. “However, it is good to see you again. How is your wife doing?”

Harry gave a short applause in response. “Finally, someone who has their priorities in order! She is happily pregnant with our first child, and I’ll be sure to mention that you asked.” Harry returned his gaze to Amelia Bones, fairly sure that he would get straight answers from her. “I have some questions about events in Britain that may have escaped notice because they were not covered by international news organizations. Has the name of Sirius Black been cleared of wrong-

doing, being that he never killed anyone, and he was certainly not my parent's Secret-Keeper? Much like Hagrid, he never even got a trial before he was tossed in Azkaban. Also has Severus Snape been tried by the Wizengamot for his murder? If not, then for the use of the Killing Curse, which was still an Unforgivable last I checked? Has Dumbledore been tried for attempted line theft, attempting to steal my money to finance his war, or any number of other offenses he's committed against me or others?"

Amelia grimaced as she contemplated exactly how she got herself into this mess. "I'm afraid the answer to all those questions is no, Mister Potter. The Wizengamot was not prepared to take the word of Rita Skeeter at face value, and you decided to make yourself unavailable for questioning."

Harry nearly exploded with rage. "So what the bloody hell happened to investigating? You know, that part where you ask other people what happened, or check the wands of the accused with Priori Incantatem, or perhaps checking Sirius's body? It's pretty hard to miss the effects of the Killing Curse once you've seen it before. Or heaven forbid you use Veritaserum, only the best truth-telling agent ever developed, to see if maybe certain people aren't telling the whole truth?" Harry was exhaling heavily by this point and forced himself to stop his rant for a moment to catch his breath. "And what exactly did you expect me to do besides run? The headmaster had just given the murder of my godfather sanctioning, right in front of me, and hours before, the Minister declared me a hallucinating liar. Who in Britain was I to trust that didn't follow Dumbledore, Fudge, or Voldemort? I guarantee that had I remained in the hospital wing, my memory would have been modified to forget that Snape killed Sirius before I woke the next morning."

Amelia thought about Harry's last question for almost a minute before answering. "Given the facts you've lain out, I can see where you didn't feel you had any other options. I would have been open to hearing you out, but since today is the first time we've met, I don't think that's a fair assessment." The former head of the DMLE shook her head in disappointment. "I know you feel that Magical Britain has failed you, Mister Potter, and you make good points about how these other matters could have been concluded. But that is simply not the

way things were done back then... and now that the Dark Lord controls the Ministry, I cannot reasonably expect these issues will be concluded in the near future."

Harry nodded in agreement. "Thank you for being honest with me. At the moment, you're right up there with Professor Flitwick as the only two British citizens I respect. Actually no, I take that back... there's one other, I'm surprised he isn't here actually."

The Charms professor frowned as he looked over his former student. "Mister Potter, if you mean your former Defense professor Remus Lupin, I'm afraid I have some rather unpleasant news on that count. When he finally returned to Britain about two years after you left, to find his best friend dead and you gone for parts unknown, he took his own life. Most speculated that it was because he couldn't live with the burden of his lycanthropy any longer, but I think that he simply couldn't bear to be alone any longer."

Harry knew he should feel something, at the very least grief that the last of his parents' true friends had passed. But instead he felt nothing, as if Remus Lupin was only another nameless casualty. Perhaps it was the former professor's fault for failing to bond with Harry, failing to share in the connection with Harry's parents, or in some part his own fault, for not leaving some form of discreet message for the older man to be able to find him. But Harry hadn't wanted to be found by anyone with even the most remote ties to Dumbledore, and unfortunately Remus fell fully under that description. "Thank you for telling me, Professor. I was unaware of his passing."

After observing a personal moment of silence for the last of the Marauders, Harry returned his attention to Amelia. "Even if I were to do as you ask and return to Britain, and even if I was successful, why will it be any different than when I left? Archaic, bigoted, discriminatory practices were the order of the day in Britain even after Voldemort's first defeat. House elves are still enslaved, despite being sentient and as fully capable of magic as you or me. Anyone of mixed ancestry is subjected to racism at every turn, and muggle-born wizards and witches are treated like second-class citizens no matter how talented they are. Tell me how I am supposed to convince my pregnant wife to move back to a society that would treat her no better

than trash in the street, were she not married to me, and our children subjected to the same?"

At that moment, Amelia knew there was no way she could continue her attempts to convince Harry to return. "I cannot. I fear, unfortunately for those who oppose the Dark Lord in Britain, there is no justification I can give nor promise I could be sure would be kept that would be sufficient. That being the case, Mister Potter, I believe we have intruded long enough. Will the magic dampening structure you've set up interfere with the use of a port-key?"

Harry gave the platform and the accompanying barrier a thoughtful gaze. "Actually, I don't know. Just to be safe, I'll take it down temporarily." Walking up to the bars surrounding the stage, Harry held out the wands he summoned towards Professor Flitwick. "I trust you can hang on to those for everyone until you all make it wherever you're going?"

The Charms professor nodded solemnly. "Yes, Mister Potter." Bowing his head as he carefully reached between the bars to take the wands, he lowered his voice to a whisper. "Would you like me to use a memory charm to remove your location from their minds once we return?"

Harry smiled as he whispered back. "Not necessary. I think after a few words with the local goblins, they will find themselves working very hard to make up for their British cousins' lack of respect. I'm thinking the Potters and Grangers will be enjoying a new home at their expense on another continent in the very near future." Returning to a normal speaking voice, Harry stepped back from the platform. "I will bring the magic dampeners for one minute. That should be plenty of time for you all to use your port-key to move along. Be warned, any of you who tries anything funny will be cursed first and asked questions later. And I think you might do well to note that a property owner in New Zealand is legally entitled to do whatever they want to trespassers."

Later that evening, Britain

"Filius, I really wish you would reconsider—" Dumbledore had been quite agitated when the group finally made it back to the castle, as Professor Flitwick had insisted on holding onto all of the groups' wands and refused to remove the silencing charms Harry had put in place.

"No, Dumbledore. I won't repeat myself again. If the best idea you can come up with is forcing a young man with no practical combat experience to walk into a fight with the Dark Lord in the hopes that somehow he'll mysteriously kill the Dark Lord to save us all, we all deserve to die for following you." Flitwick was quickly losing all patience with the former headmaster. "If that's not enough, the man is married, living on foreign soil, and his wife is pregnant. Even if you could somehow convince him this is not a fool's errand, it would be morally ambiguous at best. I believe I will throw myself on the mercy of the ICW, in the hopes that they'll allow me to seek political asylum elsewhere." The diminutive Charms professor stormed away to his office, planning to make a Floo-call to anyone at the ICW who would talk to him.

Amelia Bones followed suit, marching off to find Susan. "You've clearly taken leave of your senses, Dumbledore. Mister Potter was completely correct in his criticisms of his former country, and I'd rather take my chances on my own than continue to follow someone who supports such a discriminatory nation. I'm taking my niece away from here as soon as possible."

The rest fell into line with Dumbledore. The Weasley family because they knew no other way, Hagrid because he felt he owed it to the former headmaster, and Professor McGonagall because she had no one else to go to. It took another five years, but finally Dumbledore succumbed to the persistent assaults on Hogwarts, and with him, the last of the resistance crumbled. The ICW locked down the quarantine for good this time and no magical being left Britain ever again. A few of the loyal opposition, such as Flitwick and Bones, escaped in the early days, but once the quarantine was enforced without exception, plans were formed to destroy Britain forever, sinking it into the ocean just as Atlantis disappeared. Excuses were made to the appropriate muggle governments, and as many as could safely be evacuated fled to other countries. In the end, nearly eighty thousand wizards and

witches perished from the beginning of Voldemort's second reign until Britain was destroyed, over ninety percent of which were not Death Eaters or supporters of the Dark Lord. Over a hundred thousand muggles were also slaughtered in the chaos, but in the minds of the international wizarding community, nearly two hundred thousand deaths was a small price to pay to rid the world of the most dangerous wizard they had ever witnessed.

Later in the evening of October 31st, 2005, Harry's island

"So was I wrong today?" Harry's question came from nowhere as the pair sat on their balcony, looking out over the twilit ocean, but Hermione knew what he was referring to.

"Those people didn't want a hero to save them, Harry. They want a martyr." She knew it probably wasn't the whole truth, but Hermione was not going to allow them to guilt-trip her husband into an early grave. "They have no right to demand anything of you, and I can't lose you."

Harry rubbed her arm soothingly as he attempted to get his wife to release her death grip on his own arm. "Relax, Hermione. I'm not going anywhere without you, even if you weren't pregnant. I feel bad that people have died, but it's not my fault."

Hermione breathed a huge sigh of relief. Ten years ago, Harry would have been having conniptions and blaming himself, but thankfully he had been able to "unlearn" such attitudes. "That's absolutely bloody right... Voldemort, the Ministry, those stupid wizards who don't think for themselves and let the person with the biggest wand tell them what to do... those people are to blame, not you."

"I take it you and our parents were listening to our conversation from the security center?" Seeing his wife nod in agreement, Harry scrunched up his face in concentration. "Bloody stupid goblins. How much leverage do you think we have? Maybe enough for a cost-free relocation to the Caribbean? With a Fidelius this time... really should have done that here, but the stupid Kiwis wouldn't let us."

Hermione smiled as she thought of relaxing on a white-sand beach. "I think we can do a bit better than that, dear. We have evidence they can be bribed to give out confidential information on one of their most important clients. Imagine how unsafe the average wizard or witch would feel knowing that barring a Fidelius, their hiding spots could be betrayed for a mere sack of gold."

Harry was looking forward to his trip to the local Gringott's branch in the morning. "Best tell the parents in the morning that they should give notice we need to move again. Have them tell their boss that our bank violated our client confidentiality and destroyed our cover, that will be close enough to the truth."

Hermione leaned over and kissed her husband, drawing his hand over her stomach. It was only just beginning to visibly distend, but Harry could feel the life inside of her. "We can worry about that tomorrow. Right now I need you to take me to bed." Harry was only too happy to comply.